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Blessed Lammas

Ancient and Christian thanks-giving

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
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Pixabay photo

Inquiring Words It is our duty

Should I be so lucky again
To sit here almost motionless in time
Lapping sea
Breeze and glowing skyline;
An island horizon
Before the horizon
Of a vista that is dropping off.
Should I be so complacent again
To live here almost motionless in time
Roaring expanding sea
Wind and flooding skylines
An unearthed horizon
Before the Galaxy horizon
Of a vista that is dropping off us.
It is our duty
Oh self-centred humanity
The earth has a gravity
Not simply that of the sun and the galaxy
You have lost your respect
In your world of auto correct
Of our glorious sun and the galaxy.
It's power and its majesty
Cannot be tamed by our human travesty
Of continuous use and abuse
It's chaos and chance
Can be transformed into an avalanche
Of virtuous forward thinking happenstance.
It is our duty
To allow those interactions outside of our self
To transform the inside for the future generations to come;
To work where we can
With as many parts that began
With that big Big Bang.
We have forgotten
Why we used to think that Angels sang
It is our duty
To hear the Angels sing again
Should I be so lucky again
To hear here almost motionless in time
Angels calling
New harmonies forming
A new horizon
A new horizon of humanity
Transforming
It is our duty.

— Mark Hutchinson

Gratitude for the first fruits of harvest



Pixabay photo

By Cliff Reed

Lammas Day, the first of August, is not widely celebrated these days, but I have always thought that it deserves greater observance than it gets. As a Christian festival in England it dates back at least to Anglo-Saxon times, when it was mentioned in the writings of King Alfred the Great who, appropriately enough, is best remembered for burning the cakes! I say, ‘appropriately’, because Lammas, if not about cakes, is at least about bread.

In Anglo-Saxon and Medieval times, bread made from the first-ripened corn of the grain harvest was brought to church to be consecrated with sacred rites. Gratitude and thanksgiving for the first-fruits of the harvest have good biblical precedent, but they are a natural enough response anyway. What could give more cause for thanksgiving than the harvest on which life itself depends? But Lammas marks the beginning of the harvest and there is a long way to go before ‘all is safely gathered in’ at harvest-home. So Lammas is also about asking for good harvest weather, lest rain and storm leave the crop unharvested and rotting in the fields.

First-fruits with justice and generosity

Lammas as a Christian festival was not altogether wiped out by the Reformation, and it was included in the Church calendar as laid down in the Book of Common Prayer. One of the set readings for Lammas Day includes these appropriate words: ‘...plant gardens and eat the produce.’ (Jeremiah 29:5, 28) But although Lammas managed to make it into the Book of Common Prayer, the truth is that it was no longer regarded as a significant occasion. In fact, it had virtually ceased to be observed at all. The Puritan influence led to its being viewed with suspicion as a pagan survival with no place in Christian

practice. There was, of course, quite a lot of truth in this.

The name, ‘Lammas’, is thought to derive from the words, ‘loaf’ and ‘mass’. It was the ‘loaf-mass’ celebrating the beginning of the harvest with a loaf made from the first-fruits of the harvest. But such a celebration was far older than King Alfred and the Anglo-Saxons. Indeed, it is probably as old as agriculture itself. As we read in the book of Exodus with its laws for a settled agrarian society: ‘You are to observe the pilgrim-feast of Weeks, the first-fruits of the wheat harvest... You must bring the choicest first-fruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.’ (Exodus 34:22, 26)

And something of the mood of celebration appropriate to such observance can be gleaned from Psalm 65:

You care for the earth and make it fruitful;

you enrich it greatly...

you crown the year with good gifts...

the meadows are clothed with

sheep and the valleys decked

with grain,

...with shouts of joy they break into song.

– Psalm 65: 9, 11, 13

It was in such verses from the Hebrew scriptures that Christians were able to find the precedent for observing Lammas, along with the requirement to disburse the fruits of the harvest with justice and generosity. But Lammas had other roots that were neither Jewish nor Christian. It was these that made Lammas suspect in Puritan eyes.

Before either the Anglo-Saxons or Christianity came to these shores, the first of August was already a festival, a day of ritual and thanksgiving. To the peoples we now call the ‘Celts’

(Continued on next page)

Lammas offers hope for all humanity

(Continued from previous page)

– not a word they either knew or used themselves, incidentally – the first of August was Lughnasad, a word deriving from the name of the god, Lugh, meaning ‘the shining one.’ The first of August was his festival. Like all Celtic festivals, Lughnasad was linked to the agricultural round, and in particular to the beginning of the grain harvest. But it was not just about thanksgiving. It was also about ensuring, as far as possible, that the harvest would be kept safe from the vagaries of Mother Nature and the caprices of the gods.

For Christians, before the Reformation at least, it was the sacrifice of the mass that would ensure this. For our pagan forbears, sacrifice may well have been a part of their rituals too, but whether it was symbolic or actual, or involved animals or human beings, is very much a matter of debate – as indeed was the precise nature of the mass at the time of the Reformation.

Christianity and ‘old religion’ together

In her novel, *Sword at Sunset*, Rosemary Sutcliff speculates on the time when Christianity and the ‘old religion’ existed side by side in these islands, and when Lammas was celebrated by both Christians and pagans – and some hedged their bets by taking part in both sets of rituals. The story is set in the century after the Roman legions withdrew from Britain. The largely Christian Romano-British tribes find common cause with the wilder non-Christian tribes in the remote west and north of

Hadrian’s Wall in the shared struggle to resist the invading – and still pagan – Anglo-Saxons. Leading the resistance in Sutcliff’s gripping tale is Artos, or Arturos, who later ages have called King Arthur. Sutcliff gives us a picture of an unsettled, uncertain society where different religious beliefs and practices are often confused. She writes of Lammas:

Always there must be one to wear the horns; one to give life and fruitfulness out of his own substance, the King and the Sacrifice in one, to die for the life of the people if need be, as the Christos died. Sometimes it is a priest that becomes the Incarnate God, sometimes even a Christian priest, for in the wilds and mountain places men do not set such rigid frontiers to their faiths as they do in the cities; sometimes it is the king, the chieftain, and that is the old way, and holds within it the true meaning. Lammas fell on a Sabbath that year, and for the first part, the day was as other Sabbaths. (pp. 219-220)

In the morning, Artos and his Companions hear mass in the ‘bracken-thatched church’ and receive the ‘Bread and Wine’ from the ‘dark-froked monks.’ But in the evening, Artos goes to a very different Lammas – or Lughnasad – ritual, held at an ancient stone circle called the Nine Sisters:

The light flared brighter moment by moment, a wheel of ragged fire-tongues circling the Nine Sisters. The fierce coppery light beat farther and farther up the weathered flanks of the standing stones, driving back the moonlight; and among the tawny smoke, now glimpsed, now lost, were surely uptossed heads, horned and winged, hound-snouted and prick-eared... And in the very heart and centre of the flaming circle, the stag-headed figure sat immovable... ‘The Lammas torches are lit,’ he said... (pp. 226-7)

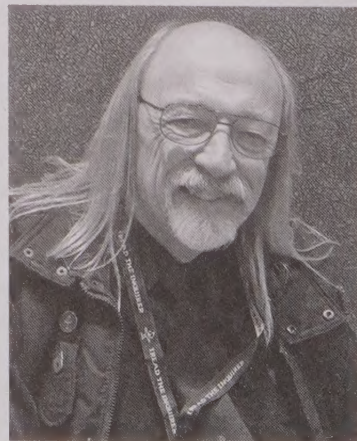
Making peace with the natural world

That, of course, is how Sutcliff imagines Lammas to have been in the 5th or 6th century – and, in truth, no one now knows for certain what went on – but she was surely right in supposing that the ancient rituals were about human dependence on the natural world, and the need to make peace with nature if harvest was to happen at all and the life of the people secured. And that is still true today. We are, in the final analysis, no less dependent on the natural world than were our forbears and if we don’t remember that fact and order our world accordingly, then we face disaster as surely as they did.

But nature does not respond to rituals of appeasement; famine is not the result of God’s wrath. We give thanks at Lammas because to do so reminds us of our dependence. And it should remind us also that the divine call for the wise and loving – and human – stewardship of the earth is as insistent today as ever it was for our ancestors.

The Rev Cliff Reed is minister emeritus at Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House.

‘Sword at Sunset’ by Rosemary Sutcliff (first published 1963), latest edition published by Chicago Review Press, 2008.



Lammas: There is a Harvest

*There is a harvest of the land.
We gather to give thanks for the food
which sustains our bodies.*

*There is a harvest of the spirit.
We gather to give thanks for the
apostles
of truth, and love, and liberty.*

*The first-fruits of the land’s harvest
bring hope
of nourishment; dispel the fear of
hunger.*

*The first-fruits of the spirit’s harvest
bring hope
of a better world for all humanity.*

Let us give thanks and worship.

From, ‘A Carnival of Lamps’ by Cliff Reed, published in 2015 by the Lindsey Press and available from Essex Hall. Details on page 2.

MOSA learns of community building

By Melda Grantham

Manchester Old Students Association (MOSA) celebrated its centenary (again) this year by holding its annual conference between the 18th and 20th of June at Harris Manchester College Oxford (HMCO).

Not being much of a conference fan I had no plans to attend. But then I saw the programme that Claire MacDonald had organised and changed my mind. I am so glad I did. Titled 'New Imagined Communities: hope, change and promise in uncertain times', it offered opportunities to learn, share and reflect on how we maintain and create communities.

The three opening speakers, Lois Keiden, Liz Slade and the Rev Lara Fuchs spoke of their experience of working either as Unitarians, or in partnership with Unitarians to connect creatively and spiritually with diverse communities in an uncertain world of constant social change. Lois, who is co-director of the Live Arts Development Agency (LADA), a company she founded and which is now based in the Unitarian chapel at Mansford Street, Bethnal Green concentrated on the relationship between spirituality, the arts, artists and human rights. Liz, a member of New Unity spoke of her experience of sacred walking, and how a re-imagining of religious practises could help to 're-spiritualise' our culture, by applying sacred practices to the everyday. Lara, a member of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists' executive community is currently developing a multi-focused community ministry in Switzerland, and spoke powerfully about ways to serve the global community, and of the work of Mission 21 (see: <https://www.mission-21.org/>) She also emphasised the importance of being on committees which create policies that have an effect on society. She asserted that there is no need for more Unitarians in the world, but that there is a genuine need for more Unitarianism in the world.

The following day there was an opportunity to hear from Professor Lori Ann Ferrell from Claremont Graduate University, California, who shared her knowledge of the Medieval world and especially the Mystery Plays, and how people in Medieval times perceived themselves as a global community of Christians, rather than as individuals.

The final speaker on the Wednesday morning was Dr



Unitarian Chief Officer Derek McAuley (left) and President Joan Cook congratulate Duncan Voice (centre) on his valedictory. Photo provided by Melda Grantham

Romola Parish, amongst many other roles, a creative tutor for the Creative Arts Retreat Movement (see: www.carmretreats.org/public/about.php) She shared her experience of 'creative theology', and demonstrated how her own textile art, and the process of creating can be a legitimate spiritual practice; awakening a connection with God amongst those who do not necessarily appreciate the traditional forms of religious worship.

During the conference we bade farewell to several old friends, to the Rev Dr Ralph Waller as principal of Harris Manchester College, to Annette Duffell as bursar, to Myles Hartley, organ scholar and to our kind and gentle tutor, the Rev Dr Arthur Stewart. We wish them all well in the next chapter of their lives. But as well as saying goodbye, there were also opportunities to welcome.

During the AGM it was revealed that the Rev Alex Bradley will be the new ministry tutor at HMCO and will commence his duties in autumn. On Tuesday evening, alongside Michael Allured it was my privilege to take part in the valedictory service for Duncan Voice when he was officially welcomed by the principal, the chief officer and the Unitarian General Assembly President Joan Cook. We wish him every success as he takes on his new role ministering to the Ditchling congregation.

The overall impression that I was left with was of dozens of greeting cards, many gatherings on the lawns, good food, good company, meaningful communal worship and a truly inspirational, well presented programme that stimulated many conversations and left us wanting to know more.

Melda Grantham is a Unitarian ministry student.



Celebrating at Oxford were (l-r) the Rev Dr Ann Peart, Alan Ruston, the Rev Daniel Costley, the Rev Dr Arthur Stewart, Duncan Voice, Joan Cook and Sir Ralph Waller.

Dukinfield congregation took cou

By Bronwyn Lowe

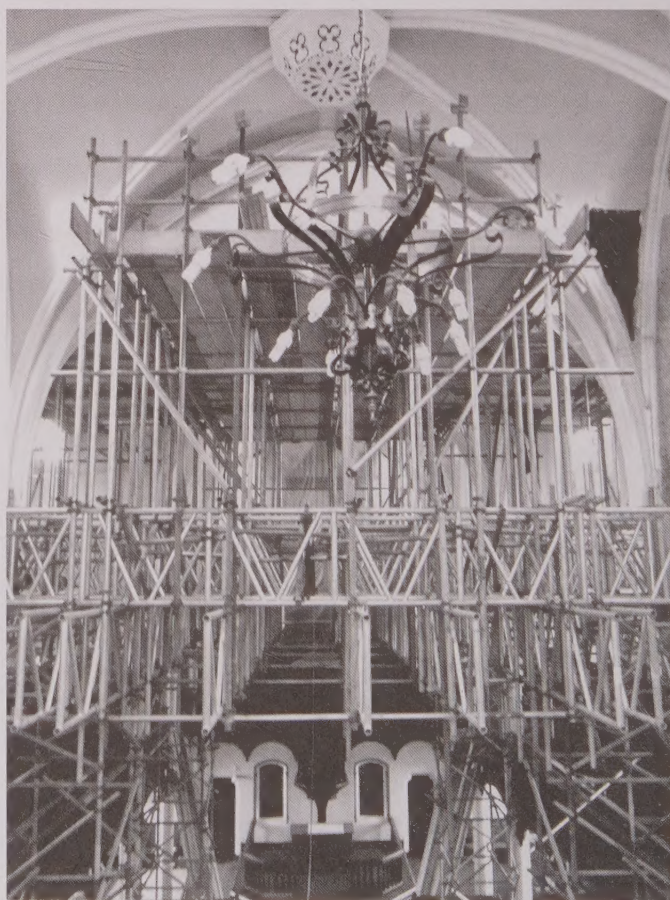
To save or not to save? That was the question. In 2014 Dukinfield Old Chapel received a sharp wake up call. We thought that as Trustees we had been quite vigilant in our care and maintenance of the chapel. But after some investigation work into a small crack in the ceiling we were given the bad news. We had to close because of health and safety. The ceiling was not safe and was becoming increasingly unstable. Now this was no mean issue in our huge neo-Gothic chapel – 10 tons of plaster just waiting to fall! And 10 weddings to rearrange for that summer, many at very short notice.

We are very fortunate to have a community hall at the side of chapel, and our worship services continued uninterrupted in the hall. In fact, we continued to hold baptism services in the hall (these being very popular in Chapel normally).

The decision was made to enlist the services of Mark Pearce of Lloyd Prichard Evans Architects. We needed to understand how much restoration was going to cost. When the figure was revealed there was a sharp intake of breath – £464,559. The chapel congregation had a decision to make – do we repair or not? Where do we get the money from if we do? I know this is a debate that many congregations must have had in the past. All chapel and church buildings are so different. And in some cases this might give a great opportunity for something new to happen.

But in the case of Dukinfield our building is Grade2* listed with a Grade 2*-listed organ. Our history is both deep and rich, and inextricably linked to the development of our town and the education of its young people. The building itself has been mentioned in many architectural tomes and is quite beautiful inside and imposing outside (not that we are biased at all!). We stand at the top of a hill where the local parish church might have been built, were it not for Robert Duckenfield, who in 1707 gave the land for a Dissenting Chapel to be built. The land was conveyed to the chapel trustees by a successor Francis Dukinfield Astley in 1826. The Neo Gothic building we have today was built in 1839 (with an imposing west front extension in 1893), after a storm destroyed its predecessor. It was built on a grand scale to accommodate the great numbers that began to swell the congregation and to show off the wealth of the many local industrialists that were members of the congregation. How times change! We have associations with the Rev William Gaskell, and with Beatrix Potter whose maternal grandparents are buried in our chapel graveyard.

Our present congregational numbers are a fraction of what they were, and our income has reduced accordingly. But for right or wrong, the congregation took the bold decision to restore the chapel. It was agreed to make a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for financial support, and so began a three-year journey. A small group of Property Trustees were tasked with putting the bid together, and if anyone has seen the application forms you will understand the headaches and heartaches that we went through just to fill them in. They are not for the faint hearted! Thousands of hours of project meeting time, a grant for £346,800 from the Heritage Lottery, a huge investment of Trustees funds, many fund-raising events, support from the John Gregson Trust, the Unitarian General Assembly Millennium Fund and our district, the East Cheshire Union and we achieved our goal. However... the work did reveal



...eous choice to save their church



Above: The now-resplendant sanctuary at Dukinfield. Photo by Brian Thornley. Other photos by Mark Pearce of Lloyd Evans Prichard. Left: Internal scaffolding during the building works. Top right: trustees inspect the roof. Below right: the dry rot which was discovered in the course of the refurbishment.

far more dry rot in chapel than could be treated in the first bid. We put restoration of our valuable stained glass windows into the bid, but had to remove the work because we couldn't afford it within the budget constraints of the Grants for Places of Worship.

And so, our story continues... we are at present putting together a second bid to complete the work, and to join our chapel building to our Community Hall in an effort to make it more usable for the local Dukinfield community. In this way we hope to provide better sustainability both for our congregation and its history. The estimate for this work – just under £1 million! We don't do things by halves in Dukinfield! But if we want to provide a building that is usable by the many – not just the few; if we want to leave something that can be used by future generations; if we want to keep a Unitarian presence in Dukinfield then we must be bold, and have the courage of our ancestors – but keep the aspirin handy we might need it!

Bronwyn Lowe is a member of Dukinfield Old Chapel (Unitarian).



Maybe I'll hit the ceiling at Ullet Road

*Under a spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he
With large and sinewy hands.*

From *The Blacksmith*
HW Longfellow

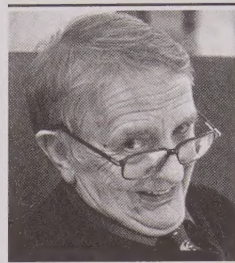
For a summer excursion, we set off to the Yorkshire Dales village of Malham, a good starting point for country rambles. Close by is Malham Cove, where the RSPB set up telescopes, to observe the peregrine falcons nesting on the steep side of the Cove. In the village's main street, near a spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands.

Passers-by can stare in, watch and smell the smithy fire and see and hear the smith at work. Picturesque and interesting, one could almost believe that this is where the American poet Longfellow (1807–1882) got his inspiration for this poem. Metal items are displayed for sale, and one can sign up for a course to learn this ancient craft. So, anything unusual here? Yes. Malham's mighty blacksmith is a woman.

Much media concern lately about mental health problems, afflicting young people especially. Still ranking highly among past heroes in the world of psychiatry is the Unitarian Samuel Gaskell (1807–1886). Born in Warrington, younger brother of the Rev William Gaskell of Cross Street Chapel and therefore brother-in-law of novelist Elizabeth, Samuel was the first medical superintendent of an asylum to be appointed a member of the Lunacy Commission. He trained in Manchester and his first appointment was to one of the emergency cholera hospitals set up in 1832. In 1834 he was appointed resident house apothecary to the Manchester Infirmary and Lunatic Asylum. In 1840 he became resident superintendent to the Lancaster Asylum, a large institution where conditions were poor and treatment was punitive. He attempted to bring in humanitarian reforms with minimisation of 'restraints'.

He worked to abolish some of the crude treatments such as bleeding and blistering, was praised for his work and was regarded as an authority. For the Lunacy Commission in 1849 he moved to London to undertake inspections, later appointed to a similar post in Scotland. He retired, alas, after a road accident. The Gaskell Medal and Prize was established in his memory by his sister, Elizabeth Holland, who made a gift to the Medico-Psychological Association for the Prize, still to this day awarded annually.

It is pleasing to read of Samuel's endeavours for humane treatment of the insane. And he was not the only one. Andrew Hill's researches into the Unitarians of York tell of a Catharine Cappe. He writes, 'In 1813 following a public scandal regarding female patients at the York Lunatic Hospital, she pressed the managers to admit women visitors by persuading more than fifty 'ladies of fortune and respectability' to become subscribers.' So, the simple task of visiting troubled patients (albeit with some risks, no doubt) which we now take for granted, was something that had to be campaigned for. Getting the terminology right, however, is tricky. 'Apothecary' has an attractive ring to it, more so than its modern equivalent,



Funny Old World

By John Midgley

'pharmacist'. 'Lunacy' and 'lunatic asylum' are terms left well behind, being based on the notion that insanity was brought about by the phases of the moon. I have mixed feelings about 'asylum', a place of safety, sanctuary, protection and support for people with problems of various kinds. Is 'insanity' all right? The Roman poet Juvenal invited us to pray for *mens sana in corpore sano* (or as the late lamented Victoria Wood put it, 'mens sana in thingamy doodah'.) It means 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'. So, 'insane' presumably means 'unhealthy'. Is insanity really just a matter of 'health', in a physical or medical sense? Should we send our troubled young people to the 'apothecary'? What about the 'talking cures' of Freud, Jung and the late David Doel? There is a long-standing, major debate here.

My thanks go to readers who responded to my query about Sir Felix Brunner, at one-time president of the Liberal Party. I had a faint memory of him being a Unitarian and several surprising replies tell me of strong Brunner family connections.

The Rev David Steers wrote, 'Felix was the son of Sir John Brunner, Unitarian benefactor to Ullet Road Church, Liverpool and Manchester College, Oxford among many places, and the grandson of a Unitarian minister.' John and Helen Parsons wrote from Stroud: 'He was the son of Sir John Brunner MP, whose name is on a foundation stone at Golders Green Unitarian Church. Sir John's father was an MP and a Unitarian, and his grandfather was a Swiss Protestant Minister who moved to Lancashire and became a Unitarian. Their company, Brunner Mond, became one of the major components of ICI. I don't think I have ever seen any other evidence of Brunner involvement at Golders Green. He was evidently the sort of prominent person whose name would lend prestige to a project.'

Andrew Hill added, 'Sir Felix Brunner was President of MCO – so says my ageing memory. Sir John Brunner is interesting because his portrait is in a corner of the Ullet Road Church library ceiling! He's there presumably because he paid for it.' Ullet Road minister Phil Waldron confirms this. 'Yes, he's on the ceiling all right, next to Aristotle!' And Martin Fieldhouse tells me he knew Sir Felix Brunner when he was 'a fellow Hibbert Trustee, a position he held for several decades, possibly a record number of years, some of them as Chair. He performed the opening of Hibbert House, London.' All very intriguing, in a 'silly season' way, but I am left pondering as to which would bestow the most prestige upon me, should I be deemed prominent enough: my name engraved on a foundation stone at Golders Green Church or my picture next to Aristotle on the ceiling in Ullet Road Church Library?

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Unitarians at the edge of Christendom

By Daniel Gerža-Honeyford

Unitarians form a church that promotes freedom of conscience and the pursuit of knowledge and the development of wisdom. We are without creed and heterodox. Many of us are spiritual misfits and wanderers, some have sought refuge from a stultifying and dogmatic religious upbringing, some of us are just heretical oddballs, and will admit it openly, but are we really a true *Christian* denomination?

Now there's a contentious issue! Personally I say yes, so long as the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth remains central to our values. My view is that, so long as we worship God (or Nature, Our Highest Ideal, a Higher Power) in the spirit of Christ Jesus, then we are a fundamentally *Christian* *ecclesia* (or gathering). As long as we express our gratitude for Being and foster a positive attitude towards life, as difficult as that may sometimes be, doing so in a manner consonant with our best understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus; then we are a Christian Church.

For Christianity has always been a flexible tradition, absorbing and assimilating the disparate ideas and customs and the often strange and unlikely people who carry them, like rucksacks, into our church community.

There's a fantastic talk by Jonathan Pageau titled 'Pentecost for the Zombie Apocalypse'. The speaker is a French-Canadian from Québec who converted to Eastern Orthodoxy and works as an icon carver. In it he speaks of iconographic representations of Saint Christopher. (See: <https://bit.ly/2fkqaPS>) He is represented as the ultimate foreigner, a barbarian, a Canaanite descendent of the giant and hybrid Nephilim. In stark contrast to the average Unitarian I meet, he is all animal passion with little rationality.

The Story of Saint Christopher

Christopher is here presented with one ambition; to serve the most powerful Lord there is. His human Lord fears the devil, so he leaves him to serve the evil one himself. Then he finds out that Satan fears the cross and so our hero leaves to serve Christ.

After much seeking, Christopher happens upon a hermit who claims to know the way to Christ: The hermit shows him how to pray, but Christopher says 'That I cannot do'.

The hermit tells him about fasting. 'That I cannot do'.

The hermit thinks for a moment, scratching his head, sighs and, in his great wisdom, says finally 'In that case you can stand by that river and offer help, and your superior height and strength, to those who cannot cross by themselves.'

In this way Christopher endeavours to serve his Lord Christ, and every day he stands at the edge of the world, by a river, helping people across. One day a small boy appears and, as usual, Christopher offers to take him across the river. The boy climbs onto the man-beast's shoulders as he proceeds to wade across the river. Christopher finds that the child is growing heavier and heavier and he can barely keep his head above the water. Eventually they reach the other bank, and Christopher, exhausted, says 'You damn near drowned me, who are you?'

The boy replies 'You have carried the weight of the sins of the whole world on your shoulders; and you prevailed'

Roughly retold, we can see the typical wandering seeker of God lurking throughout this story. In his search, he leaves one master for another, breaking his commitments to man and devil



A 19th-century Saint Christopher icon from Saint Paraskevi Church, Thessaloniki region. Image in the public domain via Wikimedia Commons

alike. After meeting the Hermit, he realises serving Christ is neither simple nor easy and requires a level of discipline he does not have. But this wise old man of God finds a solution for Christopher, which involves placing his brute strength in the service of those weaker than himself.

Eventually Christopher carries the Christ-child and, with him, temporarily bears the burden of the world's sins - the human capacity for evil - on his shoulders.

Many Unitarians, I contend, are on a similar journey towards better serving their evolving notion of the Highest Good. For some, this will have involved serving different masters, some good, some not so good. Others may find *practicing* a religion difficult; getting up relatively early on a Sunday, every Sunday; singing hymns in time, in unison and in tune; praying without feeling stupid, futile or downright loony; discovering belief in the Divine that is neither simplistic nor vague and disingenuous. In most congregations they are either making that crossing themselves or helping others make that crossing.

So we're a christian church but we may not all be Christians. We'll sit at the table with pagan and gentile; or rabbi and vicar alike. We've gathered many a strange, unwashed rabble of sinners, whom we call not sinners, for we sin also. So we break bread as equals and carry on, ignorant and foolhardy, in fear and trembling; as fellow-travellers stumbling in the dark towards the distant light of salvation. We exist on the edge of what it means to be a Christian.

Daniel Gerža-Honeyford is an attender at the Memorial Unitarian Church, Cambridge.

Letters to the Editor

Ministers must discern, go through training

To the Editor:

Re *Inquirer*, 30 June

I read the articles regarding lay ministry with great interest.

Our congregations are blessed with lay Unitarians who use their talents and skills in a leadership capacity. Without these persons, our congregations would not survive. The Unitarian movement does offer some degree of training for lay worship leaders, such as the Worship Studies Course, and it is to be hoped that these training opportunities will be widened and enhanced in the years to come.

A Unitarian minister, however, is someone who has been approved for training by our movement, trained, and added to our Roll of Ministers. Being added to our Roll of Ministers is a huge privilege, but also comes with responsibility and accountability. Those who wish to train to become Unitarian ministers must have had a minimum of three years of Unitarian involvement prior to training and, once accepted, embark on several years of training and academic study.

Ministers who come to us from another denomination or religious tradition must relinquish their ministerial credentials with that organisation before they can be accepted onto our training. There are good reasons for this. This process helps the person involved to discern that they are ready to commit themselves fully to the Unitarian movement, and understand our distinct Unitarian tradition.

The interview process allows for a process of discernment to take place between the candidate and the wider Unitarian movement. If a person has verifiable previous training or experience then this could well assist them in reaching our required competencies.

I would counsel against the notion of awarding 'provisional status' to any person who has not been through our application and interview process. If accepted for training then they will, of course, be eligible to join the Ministerial Fellowship, attend ministerial training events, etc. Local congregations can, of course,

appoint lay leaders – but these persons cannot be recognised as Unitarian Ministers by the movement until they have gone through our processes, which would include relinquishing of leadership roles in other religious organisations.

The Rev Ant Howe

Minister at Kingswood

Member of GA Ministry Strategy Group

Provide holidays with Amazon shopping

To the Editor:

The Send a Child to Hucklow Fund gets money from easyfundraising (www.easyfundraising.org.uk) when supporters shop online. Over recent years, we have raised over £1,000 without it costing our supporters anything. You go to the retailer's website via the 'easyfundraising' page and we get a small donation.

One of our regular donors drew my attention to a similar arrangement with Amazon and the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund is now registered with Amazon so that we receive a small donation every time you shop. Instead of using the regular Amazon website, go to <https://smile.amazon.co.uk> and log in with your usual account details. You can then nominate the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund as your chosen charity.

Thank you for helping us to raise £50,000 this year to provide holidays at Great Hucklow for disadvantaged children.

David Ogden

Treasurer

Send a Child to Hucklow Fund

www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk

Very difficult to communicate with BUYAN

To the Editor:

I was pleased to see some members of British and Irish Unitarian Young Adults Network (BUYAN) emerge from obscurity for the 16 June issue of *The Inquirer*, but it is time to express concern about the failure of communication with BUYAN. At the Unitarian General Assembly meetings a group representing BUYAN were given the main stage and publicly issued an invitation to chapels to invite

BUYAN to join them for Pride. Hull Unitarians came up straight away and extended an invitation for our event on 21 July.

We received assurances from several who had been part of the BUYAN presentation that they would join us. Despite repeated requests we had no confirmation as to whether BUYAN would come.

It is one thing for BUYAN to represent itself on the GA stage as being open to invitations – but another when there is a failure to follow through. Whether or not BUYAN delivered on its commitment to Hull is not now the issue. Not having a way to communicate with BUYAN members is the main issue.

When a young adult joins our chapel, they should have a way to connect up with other young Unitarians. Please make BUYAN part of our future. The UK Unitarian movement needs a viable BUYAN.

The Rev Dr Ralph Catts

Hull Unitarians

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes.

Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only.

Only Unitarians should be on the roll

In a recent issue of *The Inquirer*, guest edited by the Rev Maud Robinson, she said: 'Several of our congregations are now served by ministers who received ministerial formation in a non-Unitarian context, most recently from the Interfaith Seminary. While these ministers have undoubtedly much to learn about the Unitarian context, I feel that their commitment to have undertaken a path of ministerial formation should be recognised and that a provisional status on our Roll of Ministers should be offered to them while they undertake additional education in Unitarian context and practice.'

Sheena Gabriel writes in response.

Firstly – a big thank you to Maud Robinson for being such a wonderful guest editor – producing three great editions of *The Inquirer* on three pertinent themes, and offering much food for thought. The 30 June issue on Lay Ministry showed the huge contribution lay leaders and Interfaith ministers make to our movement. Whilst celebrating ministry in all its forms, I want to highlight the potential difficulties with Maud's proposal that Interfaith ministers be placed on the roll of Unitarian ministers with provisional status whilst undergoing further training.

My understanding is that *no* minister from any other denomination (aside from the Unitarian General Assembly-linked Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland) is automatically included on the roll, even provisionally, when taking on a Unitarian congregation. In recent years we've had an Anglican minister take charge of a Unitarian congregation, who will only go on the roll after completing Unitarian – despite previous qualifications and experience as a parish priest. Again, my understanding is that eminently qualified Unitarian Universalist Association ministers taking on Unitarian ministries in the UK don't go on the roll without further training. It therefore seems unfair to make an exception in the case of Interfaith ministers – especially when their training is not geared towards parish ministry.

This is not to denigrate Interfaith training. No doubt there's much we could learn from it – particularly the emphasis on personal development. But from my conversations with Interfaith seminarians and what I see on the web-site, the training has a very different emphasis. The OneSpirit Interfaith Foundation trains people for ministry in the community; as celebrants for rites of passage and 'bespoke' ceremonies, offering spiritual counselling and coaching, or ministering in the workplace – all good stuff. But the training does not prepare students for church-based ministry and all that entails, or to lead Sunday worship.

This is not to say that some Interfaith ministers don't have a natural aptitude for congregational leadership or leading worship. They do – as has been demonstrated at Edinburgh and Aberdeen. And my own congregation in Godalming has benefitted from wonderful services led by talented Interfaith ministers. But it shouldn't be assumed that Interfaith Ministers are trained in these areas, just because they use the designation 'Rev'.

In terms of inclusion of Interfaith ministers at Unitarian ministers' conferences, here I respond as a committee member of the Unitarian Ministerial Fellowship (UMF), though in a personal capacity. It seems unfair to open our conferences up to Interfaith ministers purely on the basis of their title, and exclude lay leaders and lay people in charge who've had considerable experience in Unitarian settings and training



The Rev Sheena Gabriel.

relevant to a Unitarian context (i.e. the Advanced Worship Studies Course) and perhaps with additional qualifications in counselling. So to be fair we either open up our UMF conferences to *all* congregational leaders – both Interfaith and Lay – or we maintain the status quo. Whilst I recognise more could be done to allow crossover between the UMF and Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry (UALM), currently opening up ministers' conferences to all congregational leaders would prove difficult to manage in terms of venue capacity and organisation. Though we may need to think more creatively about this in the future.

Lastly I want to defend the Unitarian General Assembly and UMF's current stance. In an article in the 30 June *Inquirer*, Mary McKenna sounds rightfully proud of her new Interfaith Minister in Edinburgh. But I don't believe the reasons for excluding him and other Interfaith Ministers from the roll or Ministerial Fellowship are based on organisational protectionism, dissonant with our Unitarian values. Surely we are no different in our stance from any other denomination or profession? As a Unitarian minister I would not expect to go on the roll of Anglican clergy (in the unlikely event they'd allow me to take charge of a parish). And I think it unlikely the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation would allow me to register as an Interfaith minister without undergoing their training – despite the experience and qualifications I bring. Nor would I expect it.

I agree more needs to be done to support and address the needs of *everyone* who serves our churches. The fact that Edinburgh and Aberdeen have found talented Interfaith ministers willing and able to lead, is to be celebrated. But I don't think singling out Interfaith ministers for rights not open to equally hard-working and talented lay leaders is the answer. I expect others will disagree. So, hopefully, this is just the start of a constructive and fruitful dialogue!

The Rev Sheena Gabriel is minister of Godalming Unitarians. Please direct further comments on this issue to: inquirer@btinternet.com



Arthur Stewart retires from Oxford College

Arthur Stewart (right) hands over as ministry tutor to the Rev Alex Bradley.

He writes: 'Through *'The Inquirer'* may I sincerely thank former students, friends and colleagues for their kind and thoughtful appreciation on my retirement from Harris Manchester College in June.

And may I also pay tribute to the retiring principal, Sir Ralph Waller, for his great interest and generous support throughout my time at Oxford.

It has been an immense and unforgettable privilege to have been part of our students' training over the last 11 years.'

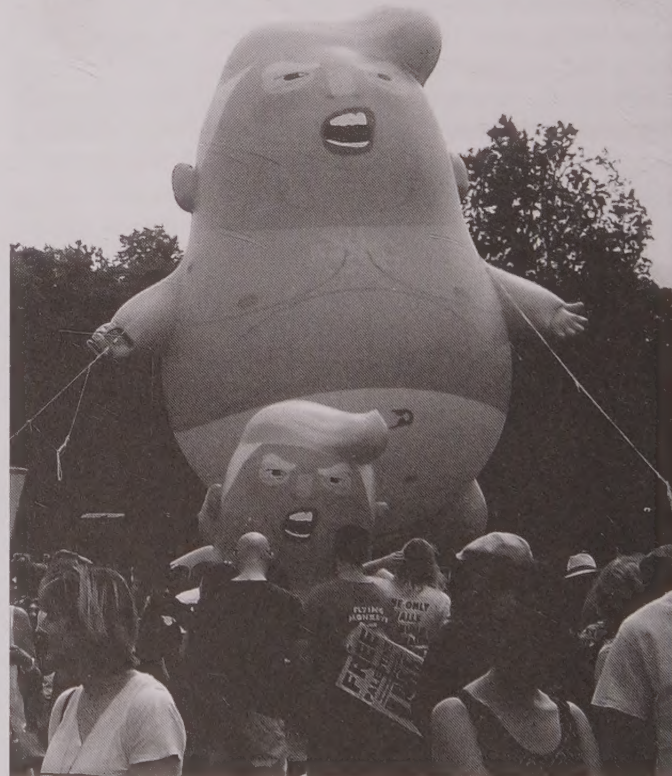
GA President protests a presidential visit

On Saturday, 14 July a group of St Mark's Unitarians attended the Anti-Trump Rally held in Edinburgh. After the march, at the rally on the Meadows we met some ex-pat Unitarian Universalist Americans, conspicuous in their canary yellow 'protest T-shirts', defying their consul's instructions to stay indoors!

As well as the usual speakers and bands, there were other like-minded organisations, and some politicians, who we were able to make contact with, and who would ask about the chalice badge. I was able to explain why as a Unitarian I felt I had to attend the rally, to be counted amongst those protesting against policies and opinions, which are against everything we as Unitarians believe. I know some people feel that rallies and marches just feed the egos of people such as Trump, giving them more airtime, and their policies greater publicity. But I think to do nothing is to convey indifference at the least, and acceptance at most. I think the people at the rally on Saturday certainly disabused Trump of the idea that *'the people of Scotland love him!'*

Many of the other groups at the rally wore distinctive T-shirts proclaiming their allegiance, and I wonder if perhaps we should take on board the American's idea of a 'protest T-shirt', a much more effective way to make our presence known when banners are impractical. One for Visibility perhaps?

The photograph is of the balloon which flew over the Meadows. Photo and text by Joan Cook, president of the Unitarian General Assembly.



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